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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this descriptive study was to garner a clearer understanding of how judgements are made by supervisors regarding the success or failure of student teachers. The secondary objectives were: (1) to identify what criteria are used to make decisions about the success or failure of student teachers; (2) to determine if these criteria change in emphasis over the duration of the student teaching experience, and (3) to determine if some criteria are deleted, added, or new labels attached. The research model used open-ended interviews with four experienced, practicing supervisors of student teachers to plot three composites of their thoughts on individual circles periodically throughout the semester. Their concentric circles provided a cause map, or idea schema, used by supervisors for decision making. Analysis of data did suggest criteria used and a shift in priority of criteria during the term. The research model seems to have potential for gathering data not usually obtained. (Author)

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Researching Decision Making in the Supervision of Student Teachers: A Study of Supervisory Judgements

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RESEARCHING DECISION MAKING IN THE SUPERVISION OF STUDENT TEACHERS: A STUDY OF SUPERVISORY JUDGEMENTS

Background

A discussion in a teacher education field staff meeting almost two years ago at Michigan State University was the impetus for this study. Considerable energy had been expended by all present in an effort to grapple with the continuing dilemma of how supervisors judge success or failure of a student teacher. This was a group of experienced supervisors without a mandate to find an immediate answer but rather a continuing cognitive itch, an uncomfortableness about a certainty proclaimed but doubted. Our espoused criteria was not easily articulated in the reality of schools and teaching when crunching pass-fail decisions had to be made. In this time of professional introspection Henrietta Barnes, department chair, encouraged those present to begin a study of how supervisors judge the success and failure of student teachers. Three members of that group accepted the challenge and began the search for those criteria used and the cognitive patterns of supervisors of student teachers in which those criteria may be embedded.

The initial step chosen was for the three field supervisors to do a self study. The method used was journaling. Each supervisor kept an extensive journal of their supervisory visits to student teachers in the field. These journals were submitted weekly to Dr. Henrietta Barnes, professor of teacher

education and Dr. Chris Clark, a cognitive psychologist, for feedback. Monthly discussions were held with the entire group and a mid-year individual debriefing was conducted by Clark and Barnes. These meetings were generative and developmental and not evaluative of the supervisory practices used. The goal was to look at "what is" and identify possible contrasts, trends and parallels perhaps suggesting more focused reflection and study.

A forum for discussing issues, readings and concerns was added at the end of the first year. This forum composed of Barnes, Clark, Moon, Niemeyer and Simons gave birth to the focus of this study. After considerable discussion during these meetings about the ambiguity and impreciseness of supervision Barnes suggested that the supervisory process "might be conceptualized as a circle." Clark obtained a "circumferential points" map for our review. Moon and Niemeyer individually plotted cognitive elements or patterns from their recall of the supervisory process throughout a term on a concentric circle paradigm. The finished circles with the cognitive patterns were compared with the concerns and ideas identified in the earlier field supervisors' journals. The high degree of agreement gave added interest and impetus in pursuing this particular line of study.

Rationale and Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to design and test a research model and engage in a study of how supervisors of student teachers decide if student teachers pass or fail the field experience called student teaching. The research is a limited response to the conclusions Zeichner and Tabachnick, (1982) reported in

their study of a supervisory belief system. They stated that the thought processes of supervisors in supervising student teachers needs the same research that has been given to the thought processes of teachers in the past. This study deals with an opening step, which is determining what thoughts and cognitive patterns supervisors consider important during their field observations of student teachers.

(a) Objectives

The primary objective of this preliminary study was:

To garner a clearer understanding of how judgements are made regarding the success or failure of student teachers.

The seccndary objectives were:

1. To identify what criteria as embedded within the thoughts of supervisors are used to make decisions about the success or failure of student teachers.

2. To determine if these criteria, embedded within the thoughts of supervisors and used to make judgements, change in emphasis or degree of value or remain constant over the duration of the student teaching experience.

3. To determine if some criteria are deleted or new labels attached and/or new ideas are added in the decision making process during the period of student teaching.

(b) Rationale

A preponderance of research and reports regarding the supervision process used by field supervisors have been primarily concerned with the structure, the mechanics and formal instruments of supervision.

A limited but growing number of teacher educators believe there is an important additional facet to these components of teacher training. The additional something deals with decision making and what Yinger and Clark (1985) call implicit theory. Early on, Sergiovanni and Starratt in their book Supervision: Human Perspective (1983) speak of the platforms of supervisors that support belief systems and, assumptions about teaching. Zeichner and Tabachnick (1982) were able to identify the belief systems of a set of student teacher supervisors.

This study attempts to identify what thoughts or ideas supervisors of student teachers consider important in the process of supervision which may help determine the criteria for decision making. It is a first step in a proposed more comprehensive and complex research project to articulate the meaning of supervisory behavior as embedded in cognitive patterns of the supervisors.

Limitations:

1. Of the four supervisors who participated three have similar professional backgrounds and are of comparable age. Thus their frame of reference may be very similar.
2. The time was restricted to one semester.
3. It was not possible to validate the self reporting by on-site observations.
4. The number of subjects who participated was small because of time and budget.

I

SELECTED REFERENCES AND DISCUSSION

The supervision of student teachers seems to be comfortably associated with the significance of the field-based (clinical) component of teacher education. The importance of the field-based experience called student teaching is rarely questioned. Laymen and professionals generally accept the conventional wisdom that practicing the craft or art is an important part of learning to teach. Because of this general acceptance of a field-based experience for teachers-in-training the supervision of these students has often been viewed in a friendly and non-critical manner. The training of supervisors was often most concerned with knowledge about the structure of schools, making arrangements for placement and how to conduct a conference with students and/or teachers.

The last ten years have seen renewed interest in supervision and what conceptual understanding and theory is or is not used (Sergiovanni 1983). Wanda T. May and Nancy L. Zimper (1986) discuss three perspectives of supervision and the rationale used for each. Their conclusion seems to agree with Glatthorn (1984) that "supervision practice is more eclectic than particularized in any one theoretical position."

Sergiovanni (1985) discusses the practice of supervision from the perception of "mindscapes." He suggests that our mindscapes or "implicit mental frames" of supervision do not reflect the reality that we face. How do we see the world? We collect or develop an eclectic model for use but do we attempt to impose our reality on the reality of the school? Is there a tendency to assume that the problem is not within our mindscape?

A viewpoint which relates to the Sergiovanni position is found in the literature outside the arena of supervision. Howard Gardner (1983) builds a case for "multiple intelligences" or "frames of mind." Gardner does not accept the concept of a set IQ but believes we have a number of intelligences and that this blend of capacities or competencies produces a unique cognitive profile. If this theory has some degree of fact the importance of at least considering our mental images and cognitive patterns in the study of supervision becomes creditable. Is it conceivable that the interaction of cognitive profiles with the mindscapes of supervisors influences their view of reality?

Glickman (1981) explains the use of eclecticism by organizing what he calls "developmental supervision." Supervisory orientations are matched with stages of teacher development. This approach to supervision depends on the supervisor's skill in assessing the teachers' level of commitment, level of abstraction and how they intersect when ideas and knowledge are put to work in the real world. While instruction is important it is not the guiding focus as it would be in clinical supervision models such as Hunter (1980) and Cogan (1973).

The complexity of supervision is somewhat overwhelming. The context, the content presented and the ideas regarding instruction all shift within moving time frames. Some authors (Garman (1986), Sergiovanni (1985) and Schon (1983)) seem to suggest that supervisors work very hard to make some sense of these complex situations. Reflection-in-action is suggested as one method to achieve some rational order in this complex situation. Schon describes this reflection-in-action as "on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, re-structuring, and testing of intuitive understandings of experienced phenomena." Sergiovanni (1985) also discusses the importance of "reflection on the process of reflection-in-action."

Traditionally practitioners such as "supervisors of student teachers are not afforded the luxury of time to reflect on student performances they have just seen or heard. Nor are they able to take stock of the part they may have played in those performances (Erickson, Florio and Buschman, 1980)." Others (Goldhammer (1969); Clark and Guba (1976); Yarger, Howey and Joyce (1977)) support the lack of time teacher educators have for serious analysis of intentional behavior in the supervisory process. More recently Smyth (1984) explicates the propensity to view clinical supervison as a fixed, efficient treatment given to our clients rather than consideration for the ways supervision can be nurturing, responding, and to use Smyth's (1984) words "emancipatory or liberating." Smyth (1984) states the problem probably as succinctly as any when he points to the importance of the supervisors' "mental baggage" and how it impinges on any procedure or cyclical process used.

The richness of inquiry from studies of teacher thinking (Yinger and Clark (1985); Clark and Lampert (1985); Elbaz (1983); and Shavelson, R.J., and Stern, P. (1981) provides direction and importance for the investigation of supervisor thoughts and ideas. If research data from studies of teacher thoughts can give us a better picture of the classroom perhaps research data from studies of the interactive process of supervision can give us a better understanding of this context.

What seems to be lacking is a method for capturing the thoughts of supervisors as the context and time frame shifts. If our implicit

cognitive patterns are related to our perceptions of reality (context and time) and thus affect our decisions regarding the use of specific supervisory techniques and the extent of success for student teachers a study of how these thought patterns emerge may be helpful.

II

RESEARCH MODEL

The design of this research study required two researchers interview four practicing student teacher supervisors. The student teaching supervisors were recruited from among the membership of a regional supervisor group by a third MSU colleague, Dr. Joanne Simmons, Grand Rapids, Michigan, who regularly participates in that group. Each supervisor represented a different teacher preparation institution; three public and one private. Demographic data on each subject was collected and tabulated. Two subjects were randomly assigned to each researcher by the resident MSU faculty member.

Each subject was interviewed four different times during fall semester 1985. Data regarding thoughts used by supervisors of student teachers were gathered during the first three sessions with each subject and reviewed during the fourth interview.

The following schedule was followed by the researcher with each subject.

Session I During the initial interview a brief written description of the study was presented and orally reviewed. Each subject completed a demographic instrument. The same written directions for completing the student teaching supervision data gathering instrument was read by each researcher to each subject to encourage objectivity. Written directions also appeared on the top of each instrument. Each data gathering session was taped.

Subjects were asked to write on a circle those thoughts or ideas they considered important in the supervision of a student teacher at that point in the semester. A circle was used as the focal point to free up subjects from thinking in terms of lists. Subjects also put a numerical ranking on each of their thoughts ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high) to express a degree of importance.

Bougon (1983) discusses the use of "cause maps," such as circles, in capturing our "action schemes." He suggests, "In contrast to languages' lineal statements, a cause map constitutes a self-contained 'cybernetic statement' summarizing one's sense-making activities." This study did not attempt to detail a complex cause map but to use this concept by employing concentric circles over a period of time in an effort to capture the thoughts and ideas of the supervisor as they interacted within each unique environment.

Session II Individually, subjects were asked at mid-semester to review their first instrument, Circle I and make any changes in entries and/or ranking. This was an attempt to strengthen validity. Upon completion of that task subjects were given a second instrument with a somewhat smaller circle representing the mid-point in the student teaching experience. The same directions for completing the instrument were given. Again subjects wrote and ranked the thoughts and ideas they considered important in supervising student teachers at this point in time.

Session III At the close of the semester long student teaching experience individual subjects were asked to review their data gathering instrument, Circle II. They were encouraged to add or delete ideas and modify their previous rankings of ideas/thoughts.

A third instrument with an even smaller circle, Circle III, suggesting the closing of the student teaching experience was administered. The same directions and procedures were followed.

Session IV The Circle III instrument was reviewed by individual subjects for modification at this time following the format used in Sessions II and III.

Each researcher reviewed each subjects' three data gathering instruments reflecting ideas they considered important and related their rankings in evaluating student teachers at three different points; the beginning of the student teaching semester, the mid-point and at the close. A composite of thoughts and ideas was drawn up for individual subjects by each researcher.

These data were treated differently by each researcher in working with their two subjects in an attempt to isolate perceptions of patterns and/or relationships in writing and orally. Individually researchers asked subjects to review all three of their earlier completed instruments in an attempt to determine if subjects saw patterns in their data. One researcher asked subjects to write the relationships they saw, the other researcher asked subjects to verbalize what they saw. This was an attempt to clarify perception of the data. Each researcher shared with individual subjects the composites drawn for each individual in an attempt to determine the apparent cognitive patterns.

The degree of agreement between researcher's perceptions and subjects' perceptions of cognitive patterns was tested.

This research model was designed to garner a clearer understanding of how judgments are made by supervisors regarding field-based student teaching experience. More specifically we need to identify what basis supervisors use to make decisions about the success or failure of student teachers. Furthermore we need to determine if these ideas used to make judgments change in emphasis or degree of importance or remain constant over the duration of the student teaching experience. Finally the research model determined if new ideas were to be deleted and/or new ideas were to be added by attaching new labels in the decision making process.

III

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The major research objective of this study was to obtain a clearer understanding of how field supervisors make judgements regarding the success or failure of student teachers.

The methodology used was an attempt to capture as much as possible of a supervisor's thinking during his/her field observations. The original focus was more on the dispositional knowledge than the procedural or propositional knowledge. However, the methodology did not exclude but rather included the total frame or context of thoughts. The analysis of these data may give some information regarding these three categories.

Primary data were obtained from three sources (a) the circles, (b) audio tapes and (c) additional written and oral comments. Additional clarification and insights came from the personal reactions of the researchers written after each visit and oral debriefing by a third researcher not actively involved in this phase of the study.

A. Data from the circles

The first step in analyzing data from the subjects'circles was to make a count of the number of ideas listed on the circle for each point (first-mid-final) in the term. The result was 31 items on the first circle (beginning of semester) 24 items on the second circle (mid-semester) and 19 items on the third circle (end of semester). This simple count of ideas listed can give an indication of a shift during the term and tell us if some ideas may not be considered throughout the term.

The second step was to attempt to categorize the ideas or thoughts on the list. This was done by the researchers independently, by two of the field supervisors in writing and two orally.

Five categories seem to emerge. They were (1) instructional skills, (2) inter-personal relations, (3) personal development, (4) logistics and (5) evaluation. A simple tally of the number of ideas or thoughts listed which might fall into each category was as follows.

Instructional skills ---------- 16

Inter-personal relations ------ 17

Personal (affective) growth --- 28

Logistics ---------- 5

Evaluation ---------- 6

Examples of thoughts listed for these categories were:

Instructional skills
"refine skills"
"internalization of skills"

Inter-personal relations
"build support systems"
"productive public relations"

Personal (affective) growth
"communication open and friendly"
"keep student at ease early in the term"

Logistics
"inform of resources available"
"distribution of materials"

Evaluation
"final evaluation accurate"
"sense of mission"
"self-analysis"

This categorization seems to indicate more concern with dispositional and procedural knowledge than propositional knowledge.

This research also attempted to determine if the criteria used to make judgements change in emphasis or focus. A careful analysis of data from the circles does indicate both shifts in focus and emphasis.

The emphasis at the beginning of the semester seems to be more concerned with general concepts such as context considerations, stage-setting and confidence building. While some of the previous concerns were still in evidence the priority at mid-semester seems to shift toward growth and understanding of self-as-teacher, instructional skills (methodology and management), professional ethics and networking. In the final stage of the semester the focus shifts toward confirmation of success, independence, integration and clarity of evaluation.

A review of comments written by supervisors, interview tapes, notes from informal discussion and debriefing notes by both researchers indicates similar shifts. These shifts can be characterized by the following sequences.

	Beginning of Semester	Mid-Semester	End-of-Semester
a.	concern for student fears	diagnostic/prescriptive	mission
b.	trust	openness	validation
c.	questioning and finding out	problem solving	evaluation
d.	context	person	
e.	roles	process -- maturity	responsible competence

The numerical weighting shows the following emphasis at different points in the term. There did seem to be a rather heavy weighting of "skills" but the particular aspect of skills seemed to shift. The concern for the student teacher's personal growth was evidenced throughout also but the perception of specific emphases and degree of emphasis shifted.

Thoughts receiving heavy weighting during the semester and generally becoming somewhat more focused in the term are listed.

First of Semester -

fun
collaboration
checking out what is
careful listening
openness
preventive medicine
basic skills - assessment - primarily communication
appropriateness of assignment

Mid-Semester

ethics
realities
creative - initiative - growth
support systems
skill modeling (especially management)
self-concept

End of Semester

evaluation
success validation
self evaluation/college supervisor
review of basics (management and organization)
continuing self development/sense of mission

These data from a summarization of the thoughts listed on the circles, from discussion, notes and tapes and from the numerical weightings given specific ideas/thoughts listed on the circles are presented in a grid format to more easily ascertain consistency.

CIRCLES (Summarization of Ideas Listed)	DISCUSSION, NOTES and TAPES	CIRCLES (Numerical Weighting of Ideas)
BEGINNING OF SEMESTER--		
context stage-setting confidence-building	concern for student fears trust questioning and finding out context roles processes used	fun, collaboration, checking out what is, careful listening, openness, preventive medicine, basic skills, communication, appropriateness of assignment
MID-SEMESTER--		
understanding self-as-teacher instructional skills professional ethics networking	diagnostic-prescription openness problem solving maturity	ethics, realities, creative, initiative, growth, support systems, skill modeling (management), self-concept
END OF SEMESTER--		
confirmation of success independence integration clarity of evaluation	mission validation evaluation person responsible competence	evaluation, success validation, self-evaluation by college supervisor, review of basics, self-development, sense of mission

It is interesting to compare these data with the stages of development for students in field experiences suggested by Haberman (1983).

1. Ritualistic
2. Reality-centered
3. Learning skills director
4. Self-evaluator
5. Insightful analyst
6. Professional decision-maker

B. Demographic data

The demographic data revealed some unanticipated similarities among the field supervisors. These similarities do not ascertain any clear relationship to other data but do indicate areas which should be considered in further study.

All of these supervisors were experienced (more than ten years). Three of the four were tenured and all seemed secure and confident regarding their professional identity. They supervised significant numbers of field students (15-60). Supervision was considered a significant part of their teaching load if not the total assignment. A small amount of formal coursework in supervision had been taken by the supervisors. All the subjects held individual conferences, group seminars, made regular field visits and observations and had other social contacts with their students. One could fairly say the supervisors composed a more homogeneous group than heterogeneous.

Would the data be different from an inexperienced and/or highly trained (formal coursework in supervision) group? Do supervisors who perceive themselves as subject matter specialists use different cognitive patterns in field supervision? These and other questions need to be considered in future studies.

IV

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Some general observations can be made from field notes and oral debriefing of the researchers by another researcher with knowledge and interest about this project.

The consistent strand running through the field notes was the confidence of the four field supervisors of student teachers. They were able to accomplish the research task with relative ease and in a short period of time. The supervisors made only minor changes on the ideas and related values written on their circles over the course of the study. When the words were changed and/or the weighting, it was done rather quickly and with apparent confidence.

The use of the circle as a data gathering technique seemed to be very appropriate. One supervisor said it was "freeing." Another said, "I would have had trouble listing my thoughts." The reduction in the size of the circle at each visit seemed to help them conceptualize the passage of time and movement toward the time for final evaluation of their student teachers. The possibility of the interaction or transactions among thoughts written on the circle was an interesting point expressed by one supervisor. This point was not pursued in this study but should be considered in future studies.

While the weighting of the thoughts was done quickly it did cause more hesitation. The consensus was that weighting the ideas was difficult. However, when all three circles were observed by the supervisors they were interested to note how their weightings indicated some shift in priority. Two of the supervisors wrote rather brief thoughts while the other two wrote their

thoughts out in some detail, almost filling the page with their writing. However, when the two supervisors who had written in more detail were asked to circle or underline key words or phrases they were able to do so quickly.

An unanticipated benefit of the research has been the opportunity to verbalize with a colleague their "thoughts of supervison." The "out-loudness" of thinking seemed to provide confidence and insight for the supervisors and the researchers. There was a reciprocal effect. The researchers found themselves reflecting about their own supervision more carefully and identifying more clearly "what I am doing and thinking now." This specificity was balanced by a clearer consciousness that each specific situation was part of a wider set of ideas.

When all the circles were completed and reviewed it became apparent that a great deal of the thinking and content was in fact, process. When some of the supervisors were asked their opinion about this they responded with a three part rationale.

First, they generally agree that because of the relative short period of time they have in the field and the immediacy of field work they had to make some assumptions regarding the students' knowledge of subject matter, content, and teaching technology. It was almost a tacit understanding that "we believe you have it until you show us you don't."

The necessity for "economy of time and efficiency" was mentioned also as a reason for more emphasis on process during supervision. The supervisor does not have the time to check every skill and bit of knowledge in a perfunctory manner thus a kind of "radar screen" is used to scan the context and locate the specific concerns needing attention. These concerns sometimes provide specific

steps for the student teacher to use for self-improvement. The supervisor is perhaps operating at two levels concurrently. His/her senses are picking up numerous bits of data as they attend to moment-by-moment blocks to the student teacher's growth. These data are somehow processed within established mind patterns which act as a selecting and alerting device. If an alerting signal rings the thinking converges more directly at that point. The general scanning of the gestalt or ecological frame has become more discrete and focused.

Finally, the importance of building interpersonal networks was explained. Student teachers tend to listen selectively at best because of the pressures they have encountered in the school context. If the trust level between supervisor and student teacher is not reasonably high most suggestions, if heard, will be discounted. Lack of trust also tends to further fragment the student teaching experience and make socialization into the profession even more difficult.

V

CONCLUSIONS

This research was initially viewed as generative. It was our hope that there would be some indication regarding the effectiveness of this rather unorthodox research design. As well as testing the research design, certain objectives for the study were established.

The research design seems to have been successful in a number of ways. It is easy to use and is apparently "freeing" for the subject providing the data. Because of this quality of openness these data are apparently more sensitive and representative of patterns of thought than a structured instrument might be.

The weakness identified by the researchers is in fact the other side of its strength. Its openness makes specificity and discrete comparisons very difficult.

The primary objective was at least partially achieved. A clearer understanding of how supervisors make judgments about student teachers was obtained. The cognitive patterns of supervisors seems to be crucial in making decisions about whether student teachers pass or fail. The precise point or criteria used to decide success or failure was not identified. Perhaps there is not one specific point or criteria but rather a shift of criteria depending somewhat on the contextual verities. If this usual shift to the next level of criteria does not occur because of lack of a student teacher's professional growth, an indication of a problem seems evident to the supervisor. It was apparent the criteria and the emphasis does shift throughout the term.

Although all the criteria may continue to be part of the cognitive pattern, different parts of the pattern seem to be shifted to the front as the semester progresses. It is almost as though different alert switches are thrown on. The cognitive patterns revealed more concern with dispositional and procedural knowledge than propositional knowledge. Yet there was an assumption the propositional knowledge was present and if not the cognitive patterns would alert the supervisor to this fact.

Given the nature of student teaching at the present in most teacher education programs, the efficiency derived from a supervisor using cognitive patterns seems to be the common sense alternative.

VI RECOMMENDATIONS

The research design employed needs to be modified to provide more precise data. It also should be tested with a larger sample in a longitudinal study of supervision. More data needs to be obtained from field observations of the supervisory activity.

In addition to the identification of cognitive patterns, some attempt should be made to clarify and refine the patterns. Groups of similar thoughts or ideas may in fact be part of one concept. If concepts can be more clearly identified, perhaps descriptors of these concepts can be determined. This would possibly be a more clear pathway to discovering how supervisors make that final decision of "pass" or "fail" on individual student teachers.

The patterns need to be validated by field observations to determine the degree of congruence between what is reported verbally and the supervisor's behavior.

An expanded study could perhaps give insight regarding the developmental processes used in supervision. How and when do such processes as reflection, capacity development, change/risk taking, and growth of professional identity operate?

An application of the work of psychologist Herman Witkin (1981) on the cognitive style dimension of field-dependence-independence may well contribute insight to the decision making of supervisors of student teachers. For example, a supervisor with a field-dependent mode of perception would be strongly influenced by the prevailing field (classroom as a whole) while supervising. A field-independent supervisor on the other hand would focus on the student teachers being "on task." Greater awareness of style could prove

helpful in identifying points where decisions are made and add clarity to patterns of supervision.

Kolb (1984) discusses the shifts that occur in a learner's consciousness, adaptation and development. These shifts in the growth of a learner may give new understanding to the process of supervision. Kolb suggests a higher level of consciousness provides an interpretative and integrative capability which is additional to the simple registrative consciousness of infancy. He quotes from William Torbert's Learning from Experience: Toward Consciousness to further explain his point.

> "Recognition of these problems [of what constitutes feedback] has led social systems theorists to attempt to deal with them by postulating two orders of feedback over and above goal-directed feedback (Deutsch, 1966; Mills, 1965). Goal-directed feedback is referred to as first-order feedback. Its function is to redirect a system as it negotiates its outer environment towards a specific goal. The goals and boundaries of the system are assumed to be defined, so feedback is also defined . . . The two higher orders of feedback can be viewed as explaining how goals and boundaries come to be defined. Second-order feedback has been named "learning" by Deutsch. Its function is to alert the system to changes it needs to make within its own structure to achieve its goal. The change in structure may lead to a redefinition of what the goal is and always leads to a redefinition of the units of feedback (Buckley, 1967). Third-order feedback is called "consciousness" by Deutsch. Its function is to scan all system-environment interactions immediately in order to maintain a sense of the overall, lifetime, autonomous purpose and integrity of the system.....
> .....consciousness provides a system with "ultrastability" (Cadwallader, 1968). Ultrastability gives the system the possibility of making changes in its structure because the system's essential coherence and integrity are not dependent upon any given structure. (Torbert, 1972, pp. 14-15)"

Perhaps additional research into the thinking of supervisors will reveal a similar hierarchy. Our completed preliminary study does indicate a concern about intention, purpose and changes necessary for goal achievement and redefinition of the goal and a feedback system.

Further study may be more fruitful if some theory or conceptual framework is used in either a generative or comparative mode. A conceptual research model which allows for the apparent shifts in cognitive patterns used by field supervisors would seem to be appropriate.

This study though preliminary, positively suggests future analysis and study of supervisory judgements (decision) would be productive in the process and content supervisors use in deciding whether people pass or fail student teaching.

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ABSTRACT

Researching Decision Making in the Supervision of Student Teachers: A Study of Supervisory Judgements

The primary objective of this descriptive study was to garner a clearer understanding of how judgements are made regarding the success or failure of student teachers.

The secondary objectives were: (1) to identify what criteria are used to make decisions about the success or failure of student teachers; (2) to determine if these criteria change in emphasis over the duration of the student teaching experience, and (3) to determine if some criteria are deleted, added or new labels attached.

The research model used open ended interviews with four experienced, practicing supervisors of student teachers to plot three composites of their thoughts on individual circles periodically throughout the semester. Their concentric circles provided a cause map or idea schema used by supervision for decision making.

Analysis of data did suggest criteria used and a shift in priority of criteria during the term. The research model seems to have potential for gathering data not usually obtained.

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